

WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Wednesday, July 22, 2015, to discuss the Pepco Reliability Enhancement Program – Phase II.

Mayor Jordan started the meeting at 8:00 p.m. The meeting was held in Room 201 of the Greenbelt Community Center.

PRESENT WERE: Councilmembers Judith F. Davis, Konrad E. Herling, Silke I. Pope, Edward V. J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts and Mayor Emmett V. Jordan. Councilmember Leta M. Mach was out of state and unable to attend.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael McLaughlin, City Manager; Cindy Murray, City Clerk; Richard Fink, Parks Superintendent; and Brian Townsend, Horticultural Supervisor.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Tami Watkins, Government Affairs Manager, Marty Lieb, Staff Forester/Arborist, and Jerry Pasternak, Vice President – Pepco; Kathleen Gallagher, Greenbelt News Review; Ethel Dutky and Charles Jackman, Advisory Committee on Trees; Ole Hass and Jon Gardner, Woodland Hills Community; Marc Siegel, Lakeside Homeowners Association; George Bachman, GHI Maintenance Director; Kathie Jarva, GHI Woodlands Committee; Jonathan Ferguson, Amy Hansen, Linda Patton, Bill Orleans and others.

Mr. Pasternak reviewed Pepco's Peak Energy Savings Credit and Energy Wise Reward energy efficiency programs. He provided an update on the Exelon/Pepco merger which was currently awaiting approval from the District of Columbia Public Utilities Commission. Mr. Pasternak mentioned the benefits of the merger, including aid that will be provided by and to sister utilities within Exelon.

Mayor Jordan explained that Pepco is embarking on a second phase of its Reliability Enhancement Program and this work is focused primarily on service lines along streets and in neighborhoods. He said Pepco's plan for this work proposed to remove approximately 375 trees along streets and do a large amount of pruning work. The bulk of this work is proposed in the central part of Greenbelt between Kenilworth Avenue and the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, in the Belle Point Forest Preserve and along the Beltway ramps. However, there are a number of streets where the proposed work will have a noticeable impact including Lakecrest Drive, Maplewood Court, Greenhill Road and the top of Lastner Lane.

Mayor Jordan said the removal of the trees is proposed because the trees have grown into the power lines. He said Richard Fink, Parks Superintendent, and Brian Townsend, Horticultural Supervisor, have reviewed the plans, met with Pepco representatives and walked all the areas where the work is proposed. Mr. Fink and Mr. Townsend have denied removal of about 75 of the trees proposed in the plan. He noted that Pepco had provided detailed plans for the tree work this evening.

Mr. Pasternak discussed the importance of Pepco's vegetative management plan to enhance customer reliability and make safety the priority. He reviewed the Public Safety Commission's Ruling RM 43 (following major power outages in 2010) which found that Pepco did not have an adequate vegetative management plan in place at that time which contributed to the major outages. He said Pepco was fined \$1 million and the State initiated legislation that required Pepco to abide by vegetative management standards for utilities.

Mr. Pasternak explained the planning, review and implementation phases of Pepco's vegetative management program. He said the planning specialists first walk to determine where tree work is needed using their professional experience and the mandates of the requirements, then the planners turn the work over to the Pepco forestry professionals for their professional review. When this phase is complete, the plan is finalized and turned over to Pepco's tree specialists.

When work is proposed in a municipality, Mr. Pasternak said Pepco notifies the municipality and establishes a dialogue to reach consensus on the scope of the project. He said Pepco has worked with City staff on the work plan proposed, and City staff has refused certain trees marked for removal and Pepco has respected the requests.

Mr. Pasternak said when work is identified on private property, a Pepco planner will inform the property owner either in person or by leaving a door hanger on their door. He said the door hanger informs the homeowner of the work and advises them to contact Pepco within seven days if they have any questions. Mr. Pasternak said a second communication is attempted the day of the planned work. He advised that Pepco will not remove a tree from private property unless they obtain the written permission of the homeowner or Pepco has preexisting rights.

Ms. Pope suggested Pepco allow homeowners 30 days to contact them regarding plans for proposed work. She said some residents may be away for extended periods of time.

Mr. Roberts said the trees marked at the corner of Hillside Road and Northway are marked for removal because of one wire, which is only for the benefit of Pepco. He said Pepco is all about saving money and its tree work is ruining the community. Mr. Roberts said Pepco should either go back to their pruning method that was used many years ago or place all wires underground.

Mr. Pasternak said Pepco's prior tree pruning practice did involve the removal of fewer trees. However, he noted that this practice had to change in 2012 when mandated by the State to develop a vegetative management plan.

Mr. Pasternak explained that Pepco's vegetative management program looks at 25% of the entire system each year so that over a four year period, Pepco will have gone through the entire system once. He noted that during each review, crews have to factor in growth of trees over the next four years.

Mr. Gardner, Woodland Hills, mentioned an incident in his neighborhood in 2012 when trees were pruned on private property without the written permission of the homeowner. Mr. Pasternak said Pepco will not remove a tree without written permission of a homeowner but will prune a tree without written permission.

Mr. Putens asked if Pepco had contacted homeowner associations regarding tree work on their property. Mr. Pasternak said yes, Pepco is currently working with GHI and other homeowner associations in the community.

Mark Siegel, 16 Maplewood Court, said the Lakeside Citizens Association had not been contacted by Pepco regarding the trees proposed to be removed in Lakeside.

Mr. Pasternak and Mr. Lieb said Pepco provides one for one tree replacement for the trees removed. Mr. Lieb said Pepco will work with City staff on types of replacement trees and determine the locations for replanting. He said county wide plantings are done in the spring and in the fall. Mr. Lieb advised there is a planting warranty of one year from the planting contractor. In response to a question from Mr. Putens, Mr. McLaughlin said the warranty (from the time the tree is planted in the ground) would be made part of the permit.

Ms. Davis asked if Pepco would be removing tree stumps during this work. Mr. Pasternak said Pepco crews typically take the tree down as close to the ground as possible but the removal of stumps is not required.

Mr. Roberts said he thinks Council should contact all of its legislators because the removal of trees in a sustainable community should not be allowed to happen. Mr. Roberts said he wanted "letters to the State delegation" to be included on the next meeting agenda.

Mr. McLaughlin said a permit for the work will be required and Public Works staff will monitor the daily work of Pepco's contractor once a plan of work is authorized. Mayor Jordan asked about the timeline for the proposed Pepco work. Mr. McLaughlin said that was up to Pepco but since approvals for the upcoming (fall) planting season has passed, it may be the spring planting season. He added that in staff's opinion, this would be preferable since this would allow staff time for some tree master planning.

Ethel Dutky, member of the Advisory Committee on Trees (ACT), said any loss of the City's tree canopy due to the tree loss by the Pepco work should be replaced for ecological reasons.

Ole Haas, Woodland Hills Association, said that approximately 20 trees were marked for removal at the corner of Hillside and Northway and he did not see these trees indicated on the maps of proposed tree removals. Ms. Watkins said those trees were on Greenbelt Homes, Inc. (GHI) property and were included on the map currently being reviewed by GHI.

Mr. Putens said the City and GHI should look at both maps in total to have a bigger picture of the amount of tree loss in the City.

Justin Baker, 6 Lakeside Drive, said he appreciates Pepco's efforts to improve customer service. He requested that Pepco refrain from overly aggressive cutting/removal of trees. Mr. Baker added that leaving tree stumps in place is depressing to residents and suggested that grinding of the remaining tree stumps may improve the community's view of the work and Pepco.

Ms. Davis asked whether any large significant trees are on the plan for removal. Mr. Townsend said some large trees that have tree rot on the top are in need of removal. Ms. Davis requested staff review the tree plan again, especially in regards to large significant trees, with a member of ACT.

Mr. Roberts said in order to protect trees for the long term, wires need to be placed underground. He said that's what many other communities have and what Greenbelt deserves because of its historic significance.

Mr. Gardner requested the City become involved in communications to homeowners regarding Pepco's work on their private property and the homeowner's right to say no. He also requested ACT review the entire Pepco tree removal plan.

In response to a question from Ms. Davis, Mr. Pasternak said Pepco had worked with the Cities of New Carrollton and Mount Rainier this year on tree work in their municipalities. Mr. McLaughlin advised that Jim Sterling, Acting Director of Public Works, is involved in a working group of Prince George's Public Works Directors regarding Pepco tree work.

Mr. Roberts said he would like "Undergrounding of Utilities" added to the list of legislative priorities for the Maryland Municipal League.

In response to a question from Mr. Roberts, Mr. Pasternak said the cost of placing utilities underground is the responsibility of the customers and the localities. He estimated the cost at \$1 to \$2 million per mile. Mr. Pasternak added that placement of the utilities underground would take many years, would involve years of substantial road work and have significant impact on the roots of existing trees.

After further discussion, Council requested:

- 1. Pepco provide a map detailing all the trees in the City, including those on private property, to be removed.*
- 2. City staff provide the public an opportunity to view maps of the proposed Pepco work*
- 3. Pepco extend the notification period to private homeowners regarding planned work on their property from 7 days to 30 days.*
- 4. Pepco and City staff work out a plan for the removal of stumps for all trees removed as part of this work.*

Mr. Herling said the City of Takoma Park had enacted legislation that designated all trees in the City, including those on private property, as City trees. He suggested Council may want to consider similar legislation for Greenbelt.

Informational Items

A number of informational items were discussed.

The meeting ended at 10:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Cindy Murray
City Clerk*